

Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac

A Critical History of Operations in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania from the Commencement to the Close of the War, 1861-1865.

By WILLIAM SWINTON.

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"WHY DON'T THE ARMY MOVE?"

Growing Impatience Over the Army's Inactivity—McClellan's Failure to Give Satisfactory Reasons—Change of Plans—Rebels Evacuate Manassas—The President's War Order.

It need hardly be said that the plan of campaign that Gen. McClellan had in his mind, and which he was unwilling to discuss in presence of his subordinates and an unwilling council, was the project of attacking Richmond by the lower Chesapeake. A few days afterward he fully developed the plan in a letter to the President, and the result was that the President disapproved it and by an order issued on the 31st of January, substituted one of his own. (14) This order was as follows:

SPECIAL WAR ORDER, No. 1.

EXECUTIVE MANSION.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31, 1862.

Ordered, That all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the railroad southwestward of what is known as Manassas Junction, and thence to be in the discretion of the Commander-in-Chief, and the expedition to move before or on the 22d day of February next.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

TIME, THE INFLUENCING CONSIDERATION.

The operation here indicated is that of a flanking movement on the enemy's position at Manassas. Now, it is due to add that in thus disapproving the plan of operations of Gen. McClellan and substituting one of his own, there is conclusive evidence to show that the President was moved less by any consideration of the relative strategic merits of the two plans of campaign, than by the question of time in regard to the commencement of active operations. With him this was the controlling circumstance; for the anxiety on the part of the Administration for an immediate movement of the Army of the Potomac had become what Gen. McClellan calls "excessive." (15) And four days before the order of the 31st January, dictating a movement of the Army of the Potomac against Manassas, the President had decreed that "the general movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces should be made on the 22d day of February." (16) It is obvious, therefore, that the President, having categorically ordered a general movement of all the armies to be made on the 22d of February, was forced to the step of prescribing for the operations of the Army of the Potomac a plan of campaign which could be undertaken at the time fixed. It was impossible that McClellan's project should be carried out at the appointed period; for not only was it necessary to put in execution the difficult task of moving the army and all its material to the designated point on the lower Chesapeake, but was necessary first of all to provide the vast amount of water transportation needed for so colossal an enterprise. Hence the order for a direct movement on Manassas.

PRESIDENT YIELDS TO McCLELLAN.

Upon the receipt of this order, Gen. McClellan lost no time in seeing the President and requesting to know whether this order was to be regarded as final, and whether he could be permitted to submit in writing his objections to the plan of the Executive and his reason for preferring his own. Permission was accorded, and on the 3d of February the General-in-Chief submitted, in a paper to the Secretary of War, an elaborate discussion of the two plans of campaign. (17) Whether from the force of reasoning of the paper, or from the fact that the Secretary of War, in writing his objection to the proposed plan, had been directed to state the result was that the President rescinded his order for the movement on Manassas; and on the 27th of February the War Department instructed the agents to procure at once the necessary steamers, sailing-craft to transport the Army of the Potomac to its new field of operations.

LINCOLN DISAPPROVED PENINSULAR PLAN.

Even after this step had been taken, however, the President, convinced against his will that he retained his aversion to the proposed movement. He repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction at the project of removing the army from Washington, and preferred that an operation should be made for opening the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad by a movement across the Potomac at Harper's Ferry, and another for the destruction of the enemy's batteries on the Potomac. Gen. McClellan seems to have been able to overcome these objections by a recital of the same considerations he had previously presented; but, on the 8th of March, the President returned with renewed vigor to his old position, and urged him to submit his project of campaign to a council of his division commanders. The meeting was

14. McClellan: Report, p. 42.

15. "About the middle of January, 1862, upon recovering from a severe illness, I found that the Army of the Potomac had taken possession of the minds of the Administration." McClellan's Report, p. 42.

16. This order, styled "President's General War Order, No. 1," was issued on the 31st of January, without consultation with Gen. McClellan (Report, p. 42). It is as follows:

EXECUTIVE MANSION.

WASHINGTON, January 27, 1862.

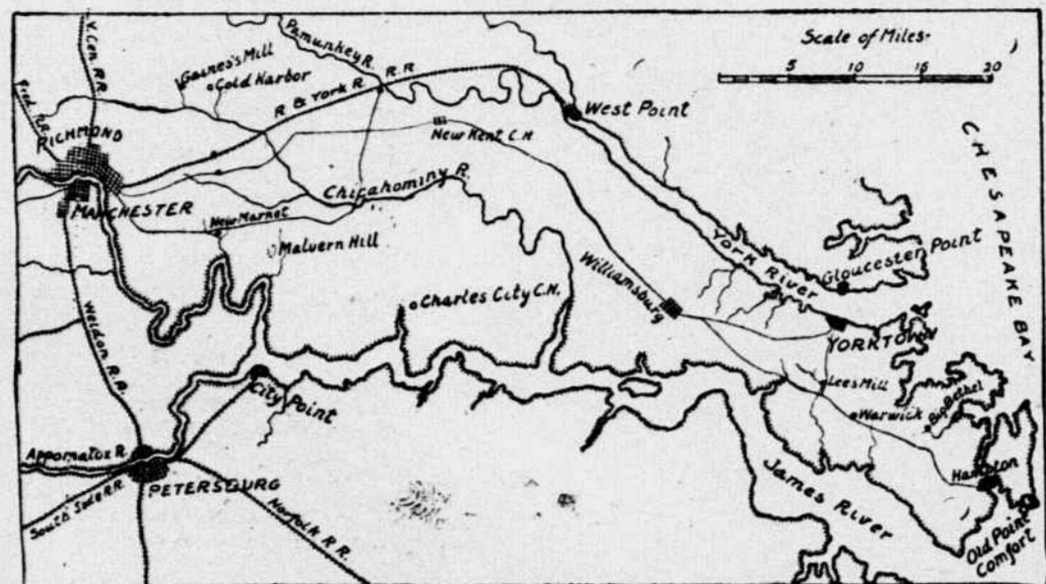
Ordered, That the 22d day of February, 1862, be the day for the general movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces. The especially the army at and about Fortress Monroe, the Army of the Potomac, the Army of Western Virginia, the army near Munfordsville, Ky., the army and flotilla at Cairo, and a naval force in the Gulf of Mexico, be directed to make a general movement. That all other forces, both land and naval, with their respective commanders, obey existing orders for the time, and be directed to obey additional orders when duly given.

That the heads of departments, and especially the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, with all their subordinates, and the General-in-Chief, with all other commanders and subordinates of land and naval forces, will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities for prompt execution of this order.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

17. Report, pp. 43-48.

18. Mr. Raymond, editor of the New York Times, who had the means of knowing the secrets of the Presidential mind, remarks: "The President was by no means convinced by Gen. McClellan's reasoning; but in consequence of his steady resistance and unwillingness to enter upon the execution of any other plan, he assented." History of the Administration of President Lincoln, p. 225.



MAP OF THE PENINSULA AND RICHMOND.

important war-orders issued on the 8th of March. The first of these orders directed the organization of the Army of the Potomac into four corps, and nominated four Generals to their command. These officers were not of Gen. McClellan's selection, while the second and certain other officers upon whom he had fixed for corps commanders. (19)

ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL ORDER.

The second of these orders prescribed the conditions upon which a change of base would be allowed, and is in the following terms:

GENERAL WAR ORDER, No. 3.

EXECUTIVE MANSION.

WASHINGTON, March 8, 1862.

Ordered, That no change of the base of operations of the Army of the Potomac shall be made without leave in and about Washington such a force as, in the opinion of the General-in-Chief and the commanders of the army corps, shall leave said city entirely secure. That no movement as aforesaid, en route for a new base of operations, which may be ordered by the General-in-Chief, and which may be intended to move upon the Chesapeake Bay, shall begin to move upon the bay as early as the 18th of March; and the General-in-Chief shall be responsible that it so moves as early as that date.

Ordered, That the army and navy co-operate in an immediate effort to capture the enemy's batteries upon the Potomac between Washington and the Chesapeake Bay. L. THOMAS, Adjutant-General.

MANASSAS EVACUATED.

It is easy to see what must have been the result of this fatal indecision, vacillation, and want of harmony between the Administration and the Chief of the Army; but it happened that this clash of opinion was suddenly interrupted by an event that made a complete change in the military situation. This event was no less than the sudden evacuation of Manassas by the Confederate army, and its retirement behind the line of the Rappahannock. Gen. Johnston, who a considerable time previously had formed the design of retiring nearer his base, had for two weeks been preparing the evacuation by the quiet removal of the army stores and war material; and when he finally withdrew his army from Manassas, on the 8th of March, so skillfully was the enterprise managed that the first intimation thereof gained by the Union forces was from the smoke of the burning huts, fired by the Confederates on their retirement. With a view rather of giving the enemy some experience in the march and bivouac than for the purpose of pursuit, Gen. McClellan ordered a forward movement of the army toward Centerville the next day, and immediately dispatched two regiments of cavalry under the command of Gen. Steneman, was sent to determine the position of the enemy, and if possible, force his rear across the Rappahannock; but the roads were in such condition that finding it impossible to subsist his men, Steneman was forced to return after reaching Cedar Run. It was found that the enemy had destroyed all the bridges, and had evacuated the Rappahannock; a reconnaissance of Howard's Division of Sumner's Corps to the Rappahannock, and under cover of this mask, the main

19. The officers nominated to the command of the corps into which the Army of the Potomac was divided were: Gen. George B. Heintzelman and McDowell. The latter was well fitted for the command by his ability, but the relations between him and the commander were not cordial. Gen. Steneman was the ideal of a soldier; but he had few of the qualities that make a General. The others do not call for any analysis. I have, in a previous part of this narrative, set forth the views of Gen. McClellan touching the organization of corps; and, as there remarked, his failure to make appointments to these commands at the time he was all-powerful resulted in his having forced upon him that capacity. It would appear from a curious piece of history detailed in the Journal of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, that it was through the pressure of the members of that committee, and of the war Secretary of War, Mr. Stanton, that corps were at this time formed; and, indeed, by them, as a species of *Ad hoc* Council, that all the larger war-questions were determined.

body of the Union army moved back to the vicinity of Alexandria. Johnston, who had retired behind the Rappahannock, finding on survey that the Rappahannock afforded a better line, moved his army thither and placed it in position on that river. (20)

WAR COUNCIL APPROVES PENINSULAR PLAN.

The Confederate abandonment of Manassas necessitated several changes in the projected campaign. In his proposed scheme of transferring his army to the lower Chesapeake, Gen. McClellan's favorite point of view, the new base of operations had been Urbana on the Rappahannock. But this enterprise, which had for its object to cut off the retreat of the Confederates on Richmond, of course became impossible after they had retired behind the Rappahannock. There now remained the move to the Peninsula—a move which he regarded as less brilliant and promising less decisive results. This project was submitted to a council of the corps commanders while at Fairfax Courthouse, on the 13th of March, and by them it was unanimously approved, provided the Merrimac (which a few days before had made its destructive raid on the Chesapeake Roads, and was now at Norfolk) could be neutralized; that means of transport for the army were at hand; that a naval force could be obtained to aid in silencing the enemy's batteries on the York River; and that sufficient force should be left to cover Washington, to give an entire feeling of security. The proceedings of this council were submitted to the President, by whom they were approved, upon condition that Washington should be made entirely safe, and Manassas Junction occupied in sufficient force to prevent its repossession by the enemy.

FOUR ARMY CORPS ORDERED.

Impressed by the emphasis of the approval which Gen. McClellan's plans received in the adherence thereto of two to the chief officers of the army, the President, nevertheless, saw fit to bind the execution of the plan, which he could now do no less than approve, by several embarrassing restrictions, contained in two

acquiringly held the same day. The Commanding General laid before the council the inquiry, whether it were advisable to shift the base of operations. The plan of a change of base to the lower Chesapeake was approved by eight out of the 12 General officers present.

But the President first disapproved it, on the ground that it would require too long a time to be put into execution.

He then approved it; but for almost a month with the order to provide water transportation to carry the plan into effect. Having at length taken this step, and while the costly preparations were, by his own order, in the full course of execution, he renewed all his old objections to removing the army from the front of Washington, and required that the question should be submitted to a council of McClellan's Generals.

These officers having approved the project, the Executive once more assented; but tied up his approval with the foolish restriction that not more than one-half the army should be taken away, until the enemy's batteries were destroyed—an enterprise which would have involved a movement of the whole army, and which was, besides, certain to be a complete fruit of the execution of the general plan.

EMBARRASSED BY THE PRESIDENT.

Again, when the evacuation of Manassas had so far necessitated a change of plan that it was determined to seek a new base of operations at Fortress Monroe, and a council of corps commanders, to whom the President had referred the decision of the question, had approved it on certain conditions as to the safety of Washington, etc., the President further embarrassed the project by requiring that not more than a large force at Manassas—a measure not dictated by any sound military consideration.

From a still weaker motion, he ordered the detachment of Blenker's Division from the command of McClellan, and transferred it to Gen. Fremont.

Finally, moved by morbidly recurring fears for the security of the Capital, no sooner had McClellan left for his new field of operations, than the President further stripped him of the powerful corps of McDowell, to retain it in front of Washington.

PRESIDENT UNDER PRESSURE.

The secret of much of this conduct, were one disposed to look for it, would be found in a "pressure" of the same kind and coming from the same source as that the President urged to Gen. McClellan to be held by the security of the Capital. There had already been a group of men, cherishing a violent hostility to Gen. McClellan on account of his so-called "conservative" policy. Under cover of the name of "conservative," they had been endeavoring to influence the President; but while it is easy to understand the ascendancy which they gained over the President, it is not so easy to see the concession is unfortunate for his reputation as a statesman.

Gen. McClellan should either have been removed from command, or he should have been allowed to work out his own plan of campaign, receiving "confidence and cordial support" promised him by the President when he assumed command, and "without which," as Mr. Lincoln justly added, "he could not with so full efficiency serve the country." It is a jealous function that of military command, and, as the whole history of war teaches, can only be effectively exercised when accompanied with an entire freedom of action on the part of the commander, and cordial cooperation and support on the part of the Government. If there be any single lesson taught by the military experience of nations, it is that when extrinsic influences, whether from councils, or congresses, or wireless intrusions into the direction of military affairs, all hope of success is gone. History has chosen to express its views of this kind of interference in the contumacious with which it has covered the Austrian Autic Council; but the Autic Council was composed at least of military men. Of what was the American council composed? True, it was inevitable that, in a war such as that which fell upon the United States, considerations of a kind that may be called political should have a great part to play; and the determination of the policy of the war was certainly a question that came within the province of statesmanship; and which, when adopted in the councils of the Government, the commander in the field was bound to adhere to and carry out.

DISCRETION ESSENTIAL FOR A GENERAL.

But beyond this, and in the sphere of the actual conduct of the war, the General must be head and supreme. "In my judgment," says the greatest of theoretical writers on the art of war, discussing the part taken by the Autic Council of Vienna in directing the operations of the Austrian armies, "the only duty which such a council can safely undertake is that of advising as to the adoption of a general plan of operations. Of course, I do not mean by this plan which is the basis of a campaign, the course of a campaign, tie down the Generals to that course, and so inevitably lead to their being beaten. I mean a plan which will define the object of a campaign, and the amount of material means which may be relied upon in the execution of the campaign, and the opening of the enterprise, and then for the possible reserves in case of invasion. It cannot be denied that all these things may be, and even should be, discussed in a council of Government made up of Generals and Ministers; but here the action of such a council should stop; for if it pretends to say to a Commander-in-Chief not only that he shall march on Vienna, but also in what way he is to maneuver to reach those points, the unfortunate Commander-in-Chief will certainly be beaten, and the whole business of the campaign will be wrecked upon those who 200 miles off from the enemy, pretend to direct an army which it is difficult enough to handle when actually in the field." (24)

GRAVE FAULTS IN McCLELLAN.

On the other hand, it is to be admitted that Gen. McClellan too, committed grave faults. He had already put the patience of the public and the Administration to a severe strain by his six months' inactivity; and in proposing to remove the army from the front of Washington, he made another and peculiarly heavy draft upon their confidence. In this he again exposed himself to the criticism already respecting his deficiency in those statesmanlike qualities that enter into the composition of a great General. Granting that the lower Chesapeake was the true line of approach to Richmond, yet still the project of a removal of the army from the front of Washington so peculiarly repugnant to the wishes and convictions of the President was a grave fault. (25)

24. Jomini: Précis de l'Art de la Guerre, vol. II, p. 47.

(Continued on sixth page.)

25. Report, p. 63.

In all 73,450

23. Report, p. 63.

At Warrenton 18,000

At Shennandoah Valley 35,403

In the lower Potomac 1,350

At Manassas 7,750

At Fairfax Courthouse 10,850

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

At Manassas 1,350

Sport Histories of Notable Regiments

By COL. WM. F. FOX.

SECOND RHODE ISLAND INFANTRY.

EUSTIS'S BRIGADE—GETTY'S DIVISION—SIXTH CORPS.

- (1) COL. JOHN S. SLOCUM (Killed). (4) COL. HORATIO ROGERS; BVT. BRIG.-GEN. U. S. V.
(2) COL. FRANK WHEATON; B. & B. BVT. MAJ.-GEN. U. S. A. (5) COL. S. R. M. READ.
(3) COL. NELSON VIALI. (6) COL. ELISHA H. RHODES.

COMPANIES.	KILLED AND DIED OF WOUNDS.			DIED OF DISEASE, ACCIDENTS, IN PRISON, &c.			Total Enrollment.
	Officers.	Men.	Total.	Officers.	Men.	Total.	
Field and Staff	2	..	2	..	..	..	16
Company A . . . . .	..	12	12	..	10	10	143
B . . . . .	..	10	10	..	8	8	140
C . . . . .	..	14	14	..	6	6	132
D . . . . .	..	12	12	..	5	5	150
E	1	14	15	..	6	6	157
F	2	5	7	..	7	7	171
G	1	12	13	..	9	9	147
H . . . . .	..	4	4	1	10	11	104
I	2	12	14	..	6	6	156
K	1	16	17	1	7	8	104
Totals	9	111	120	2	74	76	1,560

Total of killed and wounded, 428; Died of disease in Confederate prisons, 12. The above enrollment does not include the reorganized regiment.

BATTLES.	K. & M. W.	BATTLES.	K. & M. W.
First Bull Run, Va.	24	Wilderness, Va.	23
Yorktown, Va.	1	Spotsylvania, Va.	19
Oak Grove, Va.	8	Cold Harbor, Va.	4
Malvern Hill, Va.	1	Opequan, Va.	2
Salem Heights, Va.	20	Petersburg, Va.	2
Gettysburg, Pa.	1	Sailor's Creek, Va.	14
Williamsport, Md.	1		

Present, also, at Williamsburg; Seven Days; Antietam; Fredericksburg (1862); Marye's Heights; Rappahannock Station; Fort Stevens; Appomattox.

NOTES.—The Second was Rhode Island's fighting regiment. It fired the opening volley at First Bull Run, and was in line at the final scenes of Appomattox. It arrived at Washington, June 22, 1861, and after a few weeks encampment there, marched to the field of First Bull Run. It was then in Burnside's Brigade, of Hunter's Division. Burnside opened that fight with the First Rhode Island deployed as skirmishers, and the Second advancing in line of battle. Its casualties in that engagement aggregated 98 in killed, wounded and missing; among the killed were Colonel Slocum, Major Sullivan Ballou, and two captains. During the Peninsular campaign it served in Palmer's (3d) Brigade, Couch's (1st) Division, Fourth Corps; this division was transferred in October, 1862, to the Sixth Corps as Newton's (3d) Division. The regiment, under Colonel Rogers, distinguished itself in the hard-fought battle of the Sixth Corps at Salem Heights, May 3, 1863, in which action it lost 7 killed, 68 wounded, and 6 missing. At the Wilderness, it lost 12 killed, 66 wounded, and 5 missing; and at Spotsylvania, 15 killed, 32 wounded, and 6 missing. In the final battle of the Sixth Corps—at Sailor's Creek, April 6, 1865—the regiment displayed remarkable fighting qualities, engaging the enemy in an action so close that men were bayoneted, and clubbed muskets were freely used. The original regiment was mustered out June 17, 1864, the recruits and reënlisted men left in the field were organized into a battalion of three companies, to which five new ones were subsequently added in the fall and winter of 1864-5.

SEVENTY-SIXTH PENNSYLVANIA INFANTRY.

BARTON'S BRIGADE—TURNER'S DIVISION—TENTH CORPS.

- (1) COL. JOHN M. POWER. (3) COL. JOHN C. CAMPBELL.
(2) COL. D. C. STRAWBRIDGE. (4) COL. JOHN S. LITTELL; BVT. BRIG.-GEN.

COMPANIES.	KILLED AND DIED OF WOUNDS.			DIED OF DISEASE, ACCIDENTS, IN PRISON, &c.			Total Enrollment.
	Officers.	Men.	Total.	Officers.	Men.	Total.	
Field and Staff . . . . .	..	..	..	1	..	1	20
Company A	1	20	21	..	20	20	210
B	2	14	16	..	28	28	209
C . . . . .	..	14	14	1	16	17	173
D . . . . .	..	10	10	..	18	18	208
E . . . . .	..	13	13	..	20	20	190
F	2	20	22	..	21	21	203
G . . . . .	..	13	13	..	13	13	204
H	3	14	17	..	17	17	169
I	1	20	21	..	21	21	186
K . . . . .	..	17	17	..	18	18	170
Totals	9	161	170	2	192	194	1,942

Total of killed and wounded, 623; died in Confederate prisons (previously included), 52.

BATTLES.	K. & M. W.	BATTLES.	K. & M. W.
James Island, S. C.	2	Bermuda Hundred, Va.	2
Pocotaligo, S. C.	16	Cold Harbor, Va.	9
Fort Wagner, S. C., July 11, 1863	59	Petersburg Trenches, Va.	9
Fort Wagner, S. C., July 18, 1863	7	Petersburg Mine, Va.	9
Siege of Fort Wagner, S. C.	2	Deep Bottom, Va.	13
Chesterfield Heights, Va.	7	Chaffin's Farm, Va.	3
Swift Creek, Va.	1	Darbytown Road, Va.	2
Drewry's Bluff, Va.	22	Fort Fisher, N. C.	7

Present, also, at Fort Pulaski; Wilmington.

NOTES.—Fort Wagner was a memorable locality of the war by reason of many varied incidents of siege and assault, together with the dramatic character which invested some of those thrilling scenes. There were two distinct assaults; the first occurred July 11, 1863, and the second, just one week later. The Seventy-sixth took a conspicuous part in the first assault, which was made by three regiments only; the Ninth Maine, Seventy-sixth Pennsylvania, and the Seventh Connecticut—under General Strong the brigade commander. The Seventy-sixth occupied the centre of the line, its advance taking it over a ridge where it was exposed to the fire of the fort. The assault failed, but not until 180 of the regiment had been cut down. Another attempt was made on the 18th with an assaulting column of the three brigades, but it also failed, and General Strong was killed. The Seventy-sixth had the honor of participating in the successful assault on Fort Fisher. It was then in Pennypacker's Brigade, Ames's Division; General Terry commanded the expedition. As these troops remained in North Carolina, the Tenth Corps which had been discontinued was reorganized with Terry in command. General Pennypacker was badly wounded at Fort Fisher, and Colonel Littell succeeded to the command of the brigade. The Seventy-sixth was organized at Harrisburg in October, 1861; it proceeded immediately to Hilton Head, S. C., and remained in that Department until it entered the Virginia campaign of 1864. In the actions at Drewry's Bluff and its vicinity the regiment lost 15 killed, 119 wounded, and 10 missing; total, 144. It re-enlisted and served through the whole period of the war.

EDITORIAL NOTE: The above pages are reproduced from Col. Fox's famous book, "Regimental Losses." Other pages, giving short histories of notable regiments, will appear from week to week. It